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Learning From The Big Guys: Small College Libraries Take Advantage Of Big Brother's Hard Work

by Joan Bartram <bartram@salve.edu>

This paper was drawn from a "Lively Lunch" presentation on Thursday, November 4 and Friday, November 5, 1999 at the 19th Annual Charleston Conference. — KS

In the Spring of 1999 as I reviewed the results of yet another faculty survey, I paused and thought about several collection analysis tools that I have been using for the last few years: the social-science-based survey method, the **Conspectus** definitions, and the **LC-class** breakdowns from the **National Shelflist Count**. Two unrelated events caused me to reflect on how I have adapted these tools. While reviewing the spring, 1999 survey I realized that 50% of a two-person department was one person and that statistical analysis was not always applicable or necessary on such a small scale.

While reading a listserv message, I came upon a lament from a librarian at an institution smaller than mine concerning the lack of an online conspectus tool she could use. My thoughts were—"how could they afford it?" and "do they really need it?"

My reflections led me to my presentation at a "Lively Lunch" at the **1999 Charleston Conference**.

In the library profession those of us in small academic libraries are dependent upon larger institutions to perform the research and development in our field. Research libraries, and I tend to think of all of them as members of **ARL** and they are not, use statistical techniques developed for large samples as they are searching for information and solutions on a grand scale.

An inspection of the **Carnegie Foundation** Web page lists 236 doctorate-granting institutions, 275 masters colleges and universities, and 637 baccalaureate colleges. I did not include the Community colleges and special institutions listed in the same section. This is a demonstration that there are more of us than there are of them, yet they are the people that are in the position to do the work in the field.

As an artist/designer, I define scale as a proportional relationship between two or more objects of differing sizes and within each object the relationship between the parts and the whole. Proportion is just as important in using analytical tools as it is in art. If we are to make the analytical tools "work" in our smaller libraries then we need to adapt them so that the results are realistic and useable. My adaptations, outlined below, amazed me when I reviewed them after eight years of consistent use. I had worked with them for so long that they had separated themselves from their point of origin and morphed into new tools.

I arrived at **Salve Regina** in the spring of 1991 and my need to learn about my "new" collection was accelerated by the decennial accreditation visit from our regional association a few weeks after I arrived. While I had not been involved in the self-study, I was expected to generate the final set of statistical data to accompany it. Incidentally, I did not inherit one piece of analytical information about the collection.

I began with the appendices of the 1979 edition of *Guidelines for Collection Development* (Chicago, American Library Association).

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ciation) and worked with the Codes given to define collection intensity (the **Conspetus** definitions) and the breakdown of the **National Shelflist Count LC classes** given in Appendix A. I have used the **National Shelflist Count** as a framework only to gather data about my institution's collection growth. While I have expanded it in some classes and added new **LC numbers** such as ZA, I still rely on my original list. The initial use of the list involved a student measuring a shelflist at one hundred cards per inch (how far we have come from the days of the ruler). This evolved into the first scat table in our ILS and the computer tracking of data since that time.

I was charged at the same time with the creation of a Collection Development Plan. I had to find a means of defining collection development that could be used with a faculty that had not been heavily involved in book selection. The intensity level definitions that I used at the time were—Minimal Level, Basic Level, Initial Study Level and Advanced Study Level. Research and comprehensive levels are outside the scale of institutional programming and budget.

Although I have clung to an older version of the **National Shelflist Count**, I have followed the updates to the conspetus definitions. However, I continue to use the breakdown of the study levels into two parts, as it is helpful in building upper and lower division undergraduate collections.

The use of the survey technique is dear to all of us trained in a discipline based on social science methods. I have conducted numerous surveys—usually related to periodical cancellations—over the years, all based on standard approaches and standard library mythology. In the spring of 1999, I decided to ask the faculty for information, as I needed to update our Collection Development Plan. I thought about this survey carefully and it was worth it—my final response rate was 76%. I sent the survey out at a time recommended by the Library Committee—between spring break and the last round of papers.

The purpose of the survey was to discover how faculty members were asking students to use the library in their classes. We also asked which classes and/or departments did not use the library. (Radical departure from the myth that all classes in all departments require our services.) In order to make the survey easy to complete, the faculty were asked simply to

check off items. They were not asked to make lists or to prepare written responses.

In order to link the collection depth indicators with each department, the definitions for Basic Information level, Study level and Advanced Study level were included in the survey. The out-of-scope definition appeared as NLR—not library related. With the help of a work study student and a slow weekend at the Reference Desk, lists of courses from four years worth of registration booklets were compiled into departmental tables and faculty simply had to check off the appropriate level for the classes they were still teaching. They also crossed off courses no longer offered or commented on changes in the courses.

The results were tabulated not analyzed. We queried 114 fulltime faculty and observation of the results was all that was required. Analysis would have produced absurd results. The tables have served as a basis for departmental meetings and revised collection development strategies.

Title-by-title analysis of a collection cannot be ignored, even in a library with less than one hundred thousand monographs. *Books for College Libraries* comes into play in any discussion of this type, so this is the final collection analysis tool that I would like to discuss.

I go back to the original editions of this set in the go go days when we all thought we could buy everything and we believed that if we bought they would come—eventually.



About the time I heard **Evan Farber** talk about "books not for college libraries" in Charleston several years ago, I began to grapple with a woefully inadequate humanities collection. In fact, the collection was so inadequate that I needed to find a list smaller than *BCL3* just to begin. I finally thought of the booklist in the back of **Harold Bloom's** *Western Canon*. Without going into the politics of the list he did include everybody who was anybody. To verify, and sanctify his choices, I checked the author's name against the INDEX of *BCL3*.

In this day and age, I have no need to consider purchasing all of the titles recommended in this set whether or not they are not for a college library. An early collection decision was to set 1990 as the date for retrospective purchasing in all fields except the humanities. I believe that a library is an accumulative institu-

tion, and there is no need to recreate the past when you can begin building for the future. This has enhanced our current collection because as a member of consortium (**Higher Education Library Information Network**, that includes seven academic libraries here in Rhode Island, excluding Brown) we can draw from the other libraries for older materials while making our newer materials available to them. This is not a decision possible in a research library, but it is one that works well below that level.

In conclusion, as I began reviewing my adaptations I found that they worked well for me because I began with good analytical tools that survived the test of time before I began tinkering with them. As I mentioned above, I was astounded at how far my adaptations had moved away from the source document; however, I do not feel that I have compromised their use or my results. To demonstrate this as a form a technology transfer and practical survival, I would like to close with the following story.

My sewing machine was very important to me earlier in my life—it was a top-of-the-line **Singer** that was typically purchased for the upper-middle-class bride by her grandmothers several decades ago—and I used it a lot and it often needed to be repaired. Newport is on an island so I would have to take it off the island to Fall River—a city known to you perhaps only as the home of **Lizzie Borden**, but actually the heart of the Portuguese Azorian community in southeastern New England. When I would go to the Singer store, there were three distinct departments—the top-of-the-line new models, the rebuilt machines, and the treadle sewing machines and their accessories—mainly belts. I asked the salesman—"Why do you still sell treadle sewing machines? Do they go to collectors?" "No," he said, "they go to the Azores. They don't use electric machines there. Their power plants are not well enough regulated and the motors burn out."

I am the small college librarian who has adapted and re-adapted the methods of the "big brother" to meet my needs for the same reason that women in the Azores still use treadle sewing machines—because they are the appropriate technology to get the job done.

To all those Collection Development Librarians in research libraries. Keep up the good work! I don't know what I'm going to need to measure next. For additional information about the survey, please check the Collection Development Web Page at <http://www.salve.edu/library>.